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The Washington Merry-Go-Round

Viet Bombing Is Message for Moscow

By Jack Anderson

President Nixon ordered the bombing of the North Vietnamese heart and as much to impress Moscow as to deter Hanoi.

He wanted the Kremlin to understand his quest for peace doesn't mean he can be "pushed around."

In his private conversations, he has declared fiercely that he wants to lower tensions around the world and win reelection in November, but that he won't abandon America's commitments to achieve these goals.

Nixon has expressed admiration for the late President John F. Kennedy for facing down the Russians during the Cuban missile crisis, and he is prepared to do it again if another confrontation should develop.

Secret intelligence reports suggest that Hanoi expected the anti-war pressures in the United States to keep American air-sea power at bay after the assault across the Demilitarized Zone. But Hanoi underestimated Richard Nixon, who never hesitated to strike massive air blows against North Vietnam.

Earlier, he had made secret overtures through both Moscow and Peking to bring pressure on the North Vietnamese to call off the offensive. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai reportedly tried to persuade the North Vietnamese not to risk a military showdown, but

they went ahead with the offensive in spite of the advice from Peking.

Soviet Rule

The Russians, on the other hand, refused to discourage the attack. Intelligence reports claim that the Kremlin, while it didn't go so far as to encourage Hanoi to invade South Vietnam, had advanced knowledge of the invasion plans. The attackers also used Soviet-made tanks, artillery and anti-aircraft missiles.

The President believes the Kremlin could have prevented the invasion by threatening to cut off military supplies. He intends to demonstrate his resolve, therefore, by shutting off the supplies himself, if possible, with a blizzard of bombs.

The Central Intelligence Agency has warned all along that bombing will never stop the needed supplies from reaching Communist forces in South Vietnam. Gen. Creighton Abrams the U.S. commander in Vietnam, has agreed that the supplies for the present offensive were stockpiled in advance.

But he has warned that Hanoi has the power to continue a prolonged offensive. Twelve of North Vietnam's regular divisions are now fighting in the south. Another division is reported on the way to the front. This leaves only two training divisions at home.

Once the lines become stabilized, Abrams has suggested,

the Vietnam war may become a protracted, Korea-style conflict. He recommended the bombing of supply depots around Hanoi and Haiphong, therefore, to disrupt enemy logistics and to reduce the supplies that will reach front-line troops in the months ahead.

Massive Air Support

When President Nixon first took over as commander-in-chief, the Joint Chiefs advised him that the South Vietnamese army by itself would be unable to withstand an all-out North Vietnamese assault "in the foreseeable future." This assessment has now been changed, but the Joint Chiefs have warned it will take massive American air support to blunt the North Vietnamese offensive.

In private, meanwhile, the President has repeated again and again that he doesn't intend to be "pushed around"—not in Vietnam, the Middle East or anywhere else.

Once, when Jewish leaders were questioning his willingness to support Israel, Nixon asked an aide incredulously: "Can these people really believe that I could sit in this chair and let anything happen to Israel?"

The most competent White House sources tell us emphatically that Richard Nixon would like to avoid a confrontation with the Kremlin but that he won't back down from one.

Jumping Jcs

We tried unsuccessfully to reach our columnist colleague, Joe Alsop, prior to our recent report that he was among the bigshot passengers chauffeured around Washington by Pentagon cars in apparent violation of military regulations.

Alsop, who is in Southeast Asia, has now wired us the following response: "I have never used military transport that was not equally available to other reporters of comparable decrepitude."

"In Vietnam," the telegram adds, "I have also followed the strict rule of refusing any assistance going beyond what was given Scotty Reston when he made his trip there."

Reston is the distinguished columnist and vice president of The New York Times, whose views on the war have contrasted with Alsop's hawkish stance.

FOOTNOTE: We also reported that during a recent NATO military junket in the United States, cars rented by the Pentagon for the visitors' use in Washington were to be kept on rental while they spent five days traveling elsewhere. After we began looking into the matter and had sent out our column for publication, the plans were abruptly changed and the cars were returned to the rental agency. They were then rented again when the visitors returned to Washington.

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